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ABSTRACT

A pilot study investigated whether the levels of public speaking anxiety were significant among the graduate teaching assistants in the speech communication program at a large midwestern university. The 12 subjects were attending a 3-day, 24-hour workshop in training before the beginning of the semester. All subjects were master's degree students in the speech communication consultancy program. During the workshop, public speaking anxiety was discussed and intervention techniques were explored briefly. Surveys were administered four weeks into the semester, following a director visitation, and during a 2-day, 12-hour winter workshop. Results indicated that the graduate students had varying degrees of public speaking anxiety; and that their concern, and gratefulness for help, became evident when the problem was approached and intervention strategies offered. Results also indicated that finding out about speaking anxiety, through the use of surveys and discussions, proved to be a positive and useful one for the students. Findings suggest that directors of basic public speaking programs should: (1) address public speaking anxiety as a unit in teaching assistant training; (2) offer an open door for continuing help in this area; (3) encourage teaching assistants to offer help to students in this area; and (4) research this area further. (Extensive unnumbered tables of data are included.) (RS)

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THE EFFECTS OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS' PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY AND THE EVALUATION RESULTS OF CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS

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With the increasing competition for students at colleges and universities, establishing the best possible program for attracting students to the basic speech communication course is a priority on many campuses. The responsibility for teaching the basic course in speech communication is often given to graduate teaching assistants. Training programs for these graduate teaching assistants must successfully meet the need for developing high quality classroom teachers.

As a part of graduate teaching assistant training, it is important to include training on public speaking anxiety, both in identification methods and intervention methods. This training will benefit the teaching assistants with any personal public speaking anxiety as well as to train them to help their students with this problem area. Public speaking anxiety is covered in some of the speech communication textbooks (Pelias, 1989) but, in many, it is inadequate or even non existent.

McCroskey (1977) found that as many as 20% of students enrolled in university classes had significant problems with speech anxiety. There is then, the responsibility for instructors to be able to understand this problem, to be able to identify it, to find out if it impedes learning and to confront it by providing interventions to alleviate it (Mandeville, 1991). Neer (1987) stated that "identifying apprehension often appears to be even more difficult than developing effective treatments for apprehension." A further consideration should be: Do the graduate teaching assistants charged with teaching the basic speech communication course have public speaking anxiety themselves?

With this in mind, an investigation was done to discover if the graduate teaching assistants, who are responsible for instructing students in the basic speech communication classes, at a large midwestern university, had their own problems with public speaking anxiety. Teaching assistants were encouraged to take their information on public speaking anxiety and their own experiences with public speaking anxiety into their classrooms. Since the item on teaching evaluations which addresses, "positive attitude towards students" is one which has correlated with the students' general feeling about the course, in our research at this university, helping students with their public speaking anxiety could play a significant role in receiving high ratings in this area. This led to the basic research question in this study which is: What is the level of public speaking apprehension for teaching assistants in this basic speech communication course?

There are many different terms used to define the anxiety involved in communication from Clevinger's stage fright definition (Clevinger, 1955) to communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1977). For the purposes of this study, the

following definition will be used. Beatty and Andriate (1985) defined the term speech state anxiety as, "anxiety evoked and actually experienced during public speaking."

Identification is not always clearly identifiable. It was reported by Behnke, Sawyer and Kind (1987) that their findings indicated that, "(1) speakers report higher levels of performance anxiety than is attributed to them by their audiences, and (2) the level of speaker anxiety is not very accurately detected by these audiences." They further concluded that, "Students in beginning speech courses are concerned that the anxiety which they feel during public speaking will be communicated to their audiences" - even though - "untrained audiences are not very good at detecting the self-perceived anxiety of beginning speakers." Ayres (1986) found that speech anxiety was related to how students perceive their own abilities in regard to speaking. Graduate teaching assistants are students. Could the same problems hold true for them even they have elected to teach in an area whereby they are expected to model public speaking skills in the classroom?

There are a variety of self reporting scales that are available. Allen, Hunter & Donohue (1989) presented a list of 28 self report scales which are frequently used. To have a scale is one thing, but to know how to use it is another. Booth-Butterfield (1988) noted that, "most instructors do not have the training, time or resources for the treatment approach" and that speech anxiety, "is no longer a psychological disturbance," but an "instructional challenge." Training in identification of public speaking anxiety, and then methods for interventions, would appear to be helpful. But before the interventions are employed, it would be prudent to discover if the graduate teaching assistants had their own problems. Employing a first step - the "Physician, heal thyself" - philosophy might be the best approach.

This pilot study was undertaken to identify if the levels of public speaking anxiety were significant among the graduate teaching assistants in this program. If that supposition was true, then the approach to training in this area would begin with the teaching assistants themselves.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Subjects

The subjects (N = 12) used in this study were graduate teaching assistants in the speech communication program at a large midwestern university in the Fall of 1992. They were attending a 3 day, 24 hour workshop in training before the beginning of the semester. Following this training, each teaching assistant would be responsible for teaching two

sections of the basic speech communication course (approximately 50 - 60 undergraduate students). Six of the group were returning teaching assistants, with one to two semesters of experience; six were new teaching assistants. There were nine females and three males. Ten of the twelve were in their 20's and two were in their early 40's. All are master's degree students in the speech communication consultancy program. Future career plans for the twelve included teaching, consulting, training, serving publicly and jobs in human resource development. All reported previous speaking experiences, and eight said that they had been previously involved in speaking activities. This was a pilot study conducted with a small group of teaching assistants which, if relevant, could be expanded by further research.

Procedures

To investigate the public speaking anxiety of these teaching assistants, pre and post public speaking anxiety surveys were used. These were modeled after surveys created and used by this author in an ongoing investigation of the same subject with undergraduates, for the past three years (Mandeville, 1991). One survey was administered at the beginning of the training workshop, and the other at the end of the training workshop. A numbering system was used to match the pre and post surveys and allow for more freedom in answers.

During the workshop, public speaking anxiety was discussed and intervention techniques were explored briefly. Before going into timely interventions, such as systematic desensitization, it is necessary to determine the need. At first, in the oral discussions, the teaching assistants were reluctant to identify themselves as having problems, but after a few began to talk about their personal anxieties, there was an openness for discussion.

A workshop/visitation evaluation/survey was administered to the teaching assistants 4 weeks into the semester, following a director visitation, again employing the numbering system (last four digits of their student numbers). Questions were asked concerning public speaking anxiety.

After all director visitations were completed, another evaluation/survey, with written responses, was administered to the teaching assistants to determine if there were any continuing public speaking anxiety problems for themselves, or their students, and to report any successes they might have felt they had with intervening in this area. At the winter two day, 12 hour workshop, the pre test and the evaluation survey was repeated, followed by a discussion. They were also asked for written essays as to their current feelings about public speaking anxiety, both for themselves and for their students.

Survey Instruments

The first two survey instruments consisted of 5 parts:

Part I, in both the pre and post versions was for limited demographics (requests for a code number, a listing of future professional goals, for information on previous speech experience and for information on public speaking related activities).

Part II, in both surveys, had 16 questions (17 on the post survey) concerning public speaking anxiety concerns, with a response request on a 1 to 7 scale - Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Part III, in both surveys, listed 20 possible symptoms of public speaking anxiety, with a response request on a 1 to 7 scale - None to A Lot.

Part IV, in both surveys, had 4 questions on the pre survey and 3 questions on the post survey with a written request concerning public speaking anxiety.

Part V, on the pre survey only had a part for a brief essay on public speaking anxiety.

Another follow-up survey, administered to the graduate teaching assistants 4 weeks into the semester, following the director visitations, contained: 10 written response areas, 8 requesting information on public speaking anxiety.

RESULTS

Data from the following selected questions were analyzed :

1. **Teaching assistants had a desire to know more about alleviating public speaking anxiety.**

2. **Teaching assistants had limited public speaking anxiety about speaking in the classroom situation.**

3. **Teaching assistants had limited fears about speaking in the training workshop.**

4. **Teaching assistants reported at the beginning of the workshop (pre) and the end of the workshop (post) levels of public speaking anxiety.**

5. **Symptoms of public speaking anxiety noted by teaching assistants at the beginning of the workshop which had means which were 2.9 and above were:**

1. Stumbling over words
2. Tremor of knees, hands, etc.
3. Tense muscles
4. Feeling inferior
5. Feeling audience disapproves
6. Afraid of looking foolish
7. Forgetting some of the speech

6. Teaching assistants were asked if their public speaking anxiety lessened as a result of the workshop.

Data were analyzed by determining means for **Part II** and **Part III**. **Part IV** and **Part V** were analyzed separately.

In Part II, means for the entire group (N = 12) indicated that:

1. Teaching assistants had a desire to know more about alleviating public speaking anxiety.

Means and Standard Deviations

	TOTAL PRE	TOTAL POST	OLD PRE	OLD POST	NEW PRE	NEW POST
Mean	5.26	6.17	5.16	5.66	5.33	6.67
SD	1.0553	.8348	.7528	.8165	1.3663	.5164

In an analysis of variance, the following results were obtained for the returning teaching assistants (old) and the new teaching assistants (new) on the pre and the post surveys.

n=6	Pre	Post	n=12
Old	5.167	5.667	5.417
New	5.333	6.667	6.000
Total (n=12)	5.250	6.167	5.708 (Grand Mean)

p = .0237 pre and post f= 5.990 pre and post
p = .1350 old and new f = 2.426 old and new

2. Teaching assistants had limited public speaking anxiety about speaking in the classroom situation.

	TOTAL PRE	TOTAL POST	OLD PRE	OLD POST	NEW PRE	NEW POST
Mean	3.92	3.92	2.66	2.50	5.17	5.33
SD	1.8809	2.1088	1.8619	1.9748	.7528	1.0328

In an analysis of variance, the following results were obtained for the returning teaching assistants (old) and the new teaching assistants (new) on the pre and the post surveys.

n=6	Pre	Post	n=12
Old	2.667	2.500	2.583
New	5.167	5.333	5.250
Total (n=12)	3.917	3.917	3.917 (Grand Mean)

p = 1.000 pre and post f= .0001 pre and post
p = .0003 old and new f = .0074 old and new

3. Teaching assistants had limited fears about speaking in the training workshop.

	TOTAL PRE	TOTAL POST	OLD PRE	OLD POST	NEW PRE	NEW POST
Mean	4.50	3.67	3.16	2.83	5.83	4.50
SD	2.0226	1.9695	1.8348	1.4720	1.1690	2.1674

In an analysis of variance, the following results were obtained for the returning teaching assistants (old) and the new teaching assistants (new) on the pre and the post surveys.

n=6	Pre	Post	n=12
Old	3.167	2.833	3.000
New	5.833	4.500	5.167
Total (n=12)	4.500	3.667	4.083 (Grand Mean)

p = .2447 pre and post f= 1.437 pre and post

p = .0054 old and new f = 9.713 old and new

4. Teaching assistants reported at the beginning of the workshop (pre) and the end of the workshop (post) levels of public speaking anxiety.

	TOTAL PRE	TOTAL POST	OLD PRE	OLD POST	NEW PRE	NEW POST
Mean	4.00	3.17	2.67	1.67	5.33	4.67
SD	1.7056	1.7495	1.211	.8165	.8165	.8165

In an analysis of variance, the following results were obtained for the returning teaching assistants (old) and the new teaching assistants (new) on the pre and the post surveys.

n=6	Pre	Post	n=12
Old	2.667	1.667	2.167
New	5.333	4.667	5.000
Total (n=12)	4.000	3.167	3.583 (Grand Mean)

p = .0237 pre and post f= 5.990 pre and post
p = .1350 old and new f = 2.426 old and new

5. Symptoms of public speaking anxiety noted by teaching assistants at the beginning and the end of the workshop which had means which were 2.9 and above were:

This was in **Part III** of both pre and post surveys. Twenty possible symptoms of public speaking anxiety were listed with a response request on a 1 to 7 scale - None to A Lot. Following are the results.

1. Stumbling over words

	TOTAL PRE	TOTAL POST	OLD PRE	OLD POST	NEW PRE	NEW POST
Mean	3.92	3.75	4.17	3.50	3.67	4.00
SD	1.3790	1.4222	1.32192	1.3784	1.1690	1.5492

In an analysis of variance, the following results were obtained for the returning teaching assistants (old) and the new teaching assistants (new) on the pre and the post surveys. This is for the beginning of the workshop only.

n=6	Pre	Post	n=12
Old	4.167	3.500	3.833
New	3.667	4.000	3.833
Total (n=12)	3.917	3.750	3.833 (Grand Mean)

p = .7802 pre and post f= .0800 pre and post
p = 1.000 old and new f = .0001 old and new

2. Tremor of knees, hands, etc.

	TOTAL PRE	TOTAL POST	OLD PRE	OLD POST	NEW PRE	NEW POST
Mean	2.92	2.67	1.67	2.17	4.17	3.17
SD	2.0652	1.5570	1.6330	1.6021	1.7224	1.4720

In an analysis of variance, the following results were obtained for the returning teaching assistants (old) and the new teaching assistants (new) on the pre and the post surveys.

n=6	Pre	Post	n=12
Old	1.667	2.167	1.917
New	4.167	3.167	3.667
Total	2.917	2.667	2.792 (Grand Mean) (n=12)

p = .7077 pre and post f = .145 pre and post
p = .0149 old and new f = 7.090 old and new

3. Tense muscles

	TOTAL PRE	TOTAL POST	OLD PRE	OLD POST	NEW PRE	NEW POST
Mean	3.50	3.83	2.67	3.67	4.33	4.00
SD	1.7321	1.8007	1.6330	2.3381	1.5055	1.2649

In an analysis of variance, the following results were obtained for the returning teaching assistants (old) and the new teaching assistants (new) on the pre and the post

surveys.

n=6	Pre	Post	n=12
Old	2.667	3.667	3.167
New	4.333	4.000	4.167
Total (n=12)	3.500	3.833	3.667 (Grand Mean)

p = .6425 pre and post f= .222 pre and post
p = .1727 old and new f = 2.000 old and new

4. Feeling inferior

	TOTAL PRE	TOTAL POST	OLD PRE	OLD POST	NEW PRE	NEW POST
Mean	3.33	2.67	2.67	1.833	4.00	3.50
SD	1.9228	1.7753	1.9664	1.6021	1.7889	1.6432

In an analysis of variance, the following results were obtained for the returning teaching assistants (old) and the new teaching assistants (new) on the pre and the post surveys.

n=6	Pre	Post	n=12
Old	2.667	1.833	2.250
New	4.000	3.500	3.750
Total (n=12)	3.333	2.667	3.000 (Grand Mean)

p = .3635 pre and post f= .865 pre and post
p = .0494 old and new f = 4.378 old and new

5. Feeling audience disapproves

	TOTAL PRE	TOTAL POST	OLD PRE	OLD POST	NEW PRE	NEW POST
Mean	2.92	3.92	2.33	2.50	3.50	3.33
SD	1.8809	1.6214	1.5055	1.6432	2.1679	1.6330

In an analysis of variance, the following results were obtained for the returning teaching assistants (old) and the new teaching assistants (new) on the pre and the post surveys.

n=6	Pre	Post	n=12
Old	2.333	2.500	2.417
New	3.500	3.333	3.417
Total (n=12)	2.917	2.917	2.917 (Grand Mean)

p = 1.000 pre and post f= .0001 pre and post
p = .1783 old and new f = 1.946 old and new

6. Afraid of looking foolish

	TOTAL PRE	TOTAL POST	OLD PRE	OLD POST	NEW PRE	NEW POST
Mean	3.58	2.92	3.50	2.17	3.67	3.67
SD	1.6765	1.6765	1.5166	1.4720	1.9664	1.6330

In an analysis of variance, the following results were obtained for the returning teaching assistants (old) and the new teaching assistants (new) on the pre and the post surveys.

n=6	Pre	Post	n=12
Old	3.500	2.167	2.833
New	3.667	3.667	3.667
Total (n=12)	3.583	2.197	3.250 (Grand Mean)

p = .3365 pre and post f= .970 pre and post
p = .2326 old and new f = 1.515 old and new

7. Forgetting some of the speech

	TOTAL PRE	TOTAL POST	OLD PRE	OLD POST	NEW PRE	NEW POST
Mean	3.58	3.42	3.83	3.33	3.33	3.50
SD	1.6765	1.6765	1.6021	1.7512	1.8619	1.7607

In an analysis of variance, the following results were obtained for the returning teaching assistants (old) and the new teaching assistants (new) on the pre and the post surveys.

n=6	Pre	Post	n=12
Old	3.833	3.333	3.583
New	3.333	3.500	3.417
Total (n=12)	3.583	3.417	3.500 (Grand Mean)

p = .8175 pre and post f= .055 pre and post
p = .8175 old and new f = .055 old and new

6. Teaching assistants were asked if their public speaking anxiety lessened as a result of the workshop.

In a hypothesis test for means, the difference between two group means (pooled estimate of variance) was calculated.

Old Teaching Assistants (n=6) Mean 4.00 SD 5.667

New Teaching Assistants (n=6) Mean 5.67 SD 1.505

T = -1.6308 p = .0670 D.F. = 10

In Part IV, graduate teaching assistants were asked to respond in writing to questions. Eight out of twelve responded "yes" when asked what they believed caused them to have public speaking anxiety. Responses were that: (1) they worried what they audience was thinking, (2) they were afraid of looking foolish, embarrassed, out of control, (3) they were afraid of going blank, (4) they had feelings of inferiority, and (5) they experienced severe feelings of stress.

Part V, which called for a brief essay on the pre survey, was most enlightening. Many expressed public speaking anxiety fears and a need for information both for themselves and for their students. One returning (old) graduate teaching assistant (a returning person) revealed the following:

> Speech anxiety is a terrible experience. I have suffered from it quite often. I find it more difficult to speak to a small group, or in a classroom, than speaking to large groups. The main reason I suffer is from feelings of inferiority. The best way I feel to deal with it is to be prepared. I hate making mistakes and, worse yet, I hate looking foolish. I also don't make eye contact; I look at foreheads. This keeps me from making inferences about what they are thinking.

On the post training/visitation questionnaire, eight out of ten questions were concerned with public speaking anxiety; the other two were concerned with general training workshop evaluations.

(1) When asked about speaking with their students about public speaking anxiety, all but one responded that they had. The techniques they used, mostly from training information, were discussed. Some had unusual approaches, showing that they had done thinking and researching about this area beyond the training.

(2) When asked if they spoke about their own personal public speaking anxiety problems and techniques that they personally used, all but one responded that they had done this.

(3) When asked if the training alleviated any speech anxiety that they had, seven out of ten said that the training had helped them. One said that he had developed system of anxiety management.

(4) When asked if they would like more information about public speaking anxiety, all but two responded that they definitely wanted more.

(5) When asked if doing the surveys brought out an awareness of public speaking anxiety, all but one said that admitting that it existed made it easier to deal with it. They were, in general, happy to see that they were not alone with the problem.

(6) When asked if their personal public speaking anxiety had lessened in the classroom over the first four weeks, several said that they still had the

anxiety, though not as severe as the first week.

(7) When asked if they had public speaking anxiety the day the director visited their class, ten out of twelve responded, "yes." Several felt they were being watched and had feelings of paranoia, despite the previous assurances and reassurances that the visitations were meant to be positive experiences.

(8) When asked if directors of the basic speech communication courses should address the problem and give intervention strategies in the workshop, all said yes. Several thought it should be considered in the selection of teaching assistants.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF TEACHER EVALUATIONS ON AMOUNT OF CLASSROOM INTERVENTION WITH PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

All of the teaching assistants gave instruction in how to cope with public speaking anxiety: skills training, systematic desensitization and cognitive restructuring. At least one hour was spent in training, with reminder activities before each of six projects.

Semester student evaluations strong approval in assistant/student relationships. The teaching assistants, in follow up surveys attributed their high ratings in part to the closeness and the caring involved in helping students with their public speaking anxiety. The results for the 12 teaching assistants in the Fall Semester of 1992 (24 sections of the basic course) and for 10 teaching assistants in the Spring Semester of 1993 (19 sections of the basic course), in the area which indicates attitude (positive attitude towards students) and in the area which indicates overall teaching assistant instruction were the following (on a four point scale):

Fall 1992

	Attitude	**Overall TA Evaluation**
Mean	3.43	3.33
High	4.00	3.96
Low	1.82	1.94

Spring 1993

	Attitude	**Overall TA Evaluation**
Mean	3.31	3.33
High	3.94	3.85
Low	2.48	2.95

DISCUSSION

In this study, graduate teaching assistants, in the basic speech communication course, have varying degrees of public speaking anxiety. Their concern, and gratefulness for help, became evident when the problem was approached, and when intervention strategies were offered as a part of their training. This was carried over into their teaching.

Finding out about this problem, through the use of surveys and discussions, proved to be a positive one and certainly useful for this group of teaching assistants. Many said in the discussions that they felt "alone" with this problem. But by addressing it proactively, admitting that it existed, and then finding out interventions which could help, was very beneficial. During the teaching assistants' presentations and experiential exercises, which were an integral part of this training workshop, strategies were practiced openly.

This approach to the workshop began the change from public speaking anxiety to public speaking confidence. Working together on what seemed to be a unified problem brought this group together, making an open and successful training opportunity. It made this training workshop hang together with trust. The graduate teaching assistants learned that this approach to their own classrooms might work. Telling students in their individual classrooms that they were going to work together, beat the problem and develop confidence seemed a viable approach and a provided a very supporting atmosphere.

The will be a continuing follow-up study to determine the results of graduate teaching assistants' ratings, on this University's Student Survey of Instruction evaluation forms, on the item (under Rank the Instructor very high as A and to very low as E - based on a 4.0 scale): "positive attitude towards students." This will be to determine if there is a correlation between the amount of time spent on interventions for public speaking anxiety and the "positive attitude toward students" item. In the words of one teaching assistant on his essay:

> As a teacher, I feel the most important thing I can do is to serve as a resource and a form of support for students. I need to help them see this (public speaking anxiety) as a positive challenge and a "growing" educational experience by confronting their fears. I need to offer them ideas and methods to effectively deal with this. As a supportive, guiding force, I hope to help each student, individually, to deal with their fears and, while in the process, learn more about myself and develop greater personal confidence as a teacher and public speaker.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR SPEECH COMMUNICATION PROGRAM DIRECTORS

For those directors of the basic course program who do not address this issue, there are several suggestions:

1. If you do not address public speaking anxiety as a unit in your training, try it. It might just be a unifying force for the entire workshop and, ultimately, help your graduate teaching assistants to help their students in this area and to, ultimately, receive better teacher evaluations.

2. Offer an open door for continuing help in this area, and provide information, by way of articles and intervention approaches, for your graduate teaching assistants.

3. Encourage your graduate teaching assistants to offer help to students in this area.

4. Research this area further. Despite all the research that has been done, more studies could lend better insights into the needs and concerns of both the graduate teaching assistants and students in speech communication courses.

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